

Policies on Artificial Intelligence & Large Language Models

While I do believe that Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools and Large Language Models (LLMs) can serve a beneficial role in the process of learning, I am deeply concerned by the use of these tools to produce all work in a course. First, the over-reliance on LLMs results in lower comprehension of said topics and lower cognitive effort, which harms the development of critical thinking. Second, AI and LLMs do not provide users with the correct answer; they provide a probable answer. When we think about topics that intersect with morality and violence, it is incredibly dangerous to look to these tools to provide us with “probable answers.” Students need to evaluate the evidence in front of them and come to informed conclusions. AI can be a tool for de-bugging code or providing options on what to make for dinner, but it should not be a tool for discerning truth or forming opinions on fundamental topics. For these reasons, I do not permit students to submit any work that is directly copied and pasted from an LLM; I will permit students to use the tools to help organize their thoughts, to help answer clarification questions on content, or to help create study guides, but I classify anything beyond that as academic dishonesty.

Despite my firm stance on academic dishonesty, I believe that policing the usage of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Large Language Models (LLMs) is incredibly detrimental to my position as an instructor. First, AI detector tools produce high rates of false positives and are generally denounced by the academic community, forcing instructors to discern on their own whether AI or an LLMs were used by the student. This becomes a grey area very quickly. Second, policing AI usage disrupts my role as an instructor and forces me to be first and foremost an investigator. Rather than actually evaluating my students’ work and correcting them so that they can improve, I investigate “tell-tale” signs of LLM model writing and try to tear apart their work in the name of justice within the classroom. I find this to be a poor usage of my time and resources as an instructor, taking me away from my ultimate goals. Finally, the act of policing LLM usage disrupts the dynamic of trust I seek to build in my classroom. I have found that policing AI/LLM usage leads instructors to view all of the students with doubt, rather than celebrating when they produce good work. This in turn, places students in a defensive position, disrupting both the safety of the classroom and the trust between instructor and students.

My preferred method to prevent AI and LLM usage is through assignment design rather than assignment investigation; my goal is to create assignments that are easier to complete without a LLM than with the help of one. The first of these assignments is weekly reflection assignments. Each week, students are required to submit a journal entry, writing their personal reflections on the content of the course for that week. Students are explicitly barred from writing summaries of the content; they must engage with the content in a personal manner, either reflecting on questions they had, ways that the material intersect with their lives, or any reactions. If the students simply regurgitate the information from the class, they receive a 0, but if they submit some form of personal reflection, they receive full credit. This makes submitting their personal opinions the easiest path to a good grade. Overall, many of the students found them enjoyable. One student wrote in their evaluation of my course, “The journal assignments helped me reflect and take an active role in my learning, which I might not have done otherwise.”

Second, I offered my students the opportunity to have an alternative essay assignment by giving me an oral version of their essay and responding to two questions that I would ask them afterwards. I implemented this assignment for two reasons: first, students cannot use Artificial Intelligence (AI) or Large Language Models (LLMs) to respond to questions in a conversation; they are rewarded for developing their opinions and argument independently rather than with the input of a LLM. Second, I believe firmly that verbal communication is a skill atrophied through the isolation of the COVID

pandemic for many young people. If students are to engage in any form of communication about these topics, it is most likely to be through verbal conversation with peers, colleagues, and family members. The ability to orally communicate their thoughts and respond to follow-up questions would serve them far more outside of the classroom. This alternative assignment requires more time and dedication on my part than simply grading written essays, but I found that many of my students considered this assignment the most rewarding and impactful element of the course.

Finally, I do recognize AI and LLMs as tools that can aid in practical skills and can make more intimidating data tools like Stata or R accessible to beginners. I am happy to recommend AI tools or LLMs for navigating these statistical tools outside of class or office hours. While I make clear that any form of copy-and-paste from AI/LLM writing is academic dishonesty, I encourage students to use AI tools to generate study guides or practice essay questions as a form of studying for the exams. In an attempt to minimize students turning to popular AI tools/LLMs, I created a LLM tutor through the university's Sage tool and trained it on the syllabus, lectures, and readings. I also implemented strict guidelines on what it could produce. It was trained to not generate essays or take a stance on argumentative topics, but rather would point out information in the material and could generate practice exam questions or essay prompts. The AI tutor reported 896 interactions over the entirety of the course, with the majority of the interactions occurring before the midterm and the exam. Particularly when teaching students about misinformation in AI/LLMs, I find creating a safer tool with strong guidelines on the material it produces to be a valuable tool to detract from AI/LLM usage in writing and producing argumentative essays.